

Soldier Boy

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Summary: AU. It started as a simple mission - nothing more. But that's always how it starts... A complex story about how one team of mercenaries are dragged into a conflict of life and death. Contains romance, but not much. [Chapter 2 up!]

***Chapter 1*: The Lonely Soldier Boy**

Moy. Leave it to me to have multiple projects going on. But I digress.

Welcome, welcome, welcome to my (few) loyal reviewers and anyone else who's reading this! I should warn you: this fanfic has been caused due to playing too much Xenosaga and my borrowing of FF8. Their future-esque concepts and plot lines have caused me to make me want to write my very own futuristic fanfic as well. Yes, you may all stop booing now.

Also, even though the genre is Action/Adventure/Drama, there are other genres added to this as well: Romance, Angst, and some sci-fi elements.

And so, like I do in so many of my other fics, I will just put the disclaimer here and now in the first chapter, and you can just refer to it whenever you start feeling that I really do own Golden Sun.

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The "Lonely Soldier Boy". That's what his fellow students called him, anyway.

"Hey," whispered a female cadet, "I heard that the kid over there," - she pointed to Isaac - "is going to become a military gruntie once he graduates."

"No way!" whispered another cadet, this one a male, "Soldier Boy? Hah! Haven't you heard the rumors?"

"Which?" asked a different female.

"You know..." the only male out of the three rolled his eyes. "Isaac DeSol as *regular infantry*? Are you kidding me? The guy's *total* mercenary material! I heard that last year, he beat up the Academy bully *just* for five hundred!" The two girls huddled with him let out an "Ooooh..." and lifted an eye in Isaac's direction.

Isaac sighed in frustration and shut his book angrily. Ignoring the glances made by the three cadets, Isaac walked by them without even casting an eye in their direction, even though the three were highly aware that Isaac had heard the entire conversation. Isaac headed back towards the Academy's sliding glass doors and left the courtyard.

Once inside the main lobby, he sighed once more, all the more frustrated. So, that was the rumor of the month. He stuffed his book – and his hands – into his pockets and headed up to the front desk.

Isaac was a 17-year old student at the West Angaran Academy, and dressed in its uniform of navy-blue pants and a button-down navy-blue jacket with gold buttons and trims. He was of a pretty much average height for his age, measuring at about 5'10". From an outsider perspective, he didn't look too intimidating with his pale skin, slight muscular build, and lithe body frame. From another perspective – particularly a female one, Isaac could be considered quite handsome, or even sexy, with his quiet and pensive demeanor, unruly golden-blond hair, and sapphire eyes that reflected the uncanny and ironic innocence of a military student.

But that was not the case. In fact, Isaac was considered the complete opposite of those. People fear what they do not understand – it's human nature. Many people were fearful or at least distrustful of Isaac because he was *far* too quiet and reserved for a student in the Academy. Rumors about him spread like wildfire.

Oh, he'd heard the rumors. Some said that he was the bastard son of the headmaster or one of the faculty members. Some said that he was a complete mercenary in every aspect of life – he'd beat up students; he'd sleep with someone; or even fail a test just for some cash. Others said he was a terrorist in disguise, and that he secretly planned to gun everyone to death at the graduation ceremony. People called him the "Lonely Soldier Boy" because of those rumors – no matter what they were about.

Isaac walked up past the front desk in the lobby, his eyes glaring daggers at the other students, and a scowl on his face. The desk's secretary – a woman by the name of Layana – looked up from her computer and called out to Isaac.
"Excuse me, Isaac DeSol?"

Isaac cocked his head in her direction. "Yes?"

"Um..." the woman began, fumbling with what to say, "Your friend...Mr. Jerra, I believe it was... asked me to tell you that he reserved a time slot for sparring, and to meet him at the Colosso Delta."

Isaac blinked, and then nodded politely. "Thanks, Miss. Layana. I 'preciate it." Waving his good-bye, Isaac headed up to a near-by elevator. He pushed the "Up" button, and the elevator doors soon opened. Once inside, Isaac selected the fourth floor – the location of Colosso Delta.

The name "Lonely Soldier Boy" was really complete and total B.S., as Isaac called it once. Isaac wasn't "lonely" per se. He had friends, one of which was his fellow student and friend of 3 years: Garret Jerra.

Ding Dong!

The elevator opened up and Isaac stepped outside. Students loitering in the hallways suddenly stopped what they were doing and stared at the soon-to-be graduate. Isaac scowled and walked through the white walls, never once giving even the slightest of glance towards his fellow students.

Several minutes later, Isaac found himself at the doorway to Colosso Delta. The Colosso system was, in simplest form, a training room of sorts, named after the gladiatorial games of old. Students could practice with their weapon or weapons of choice, spar with other students, or practice some of the other forms of combat taught at the Academy. Every floor had a Colosso system in the center of each floor, and since Isaac was currently on the fourth floor, he was near Colosso Delta.

The sliding doors receded to the wall as Isaac stepped inside. Before him was a small hallway leading to the main chamber, but the purpose of this hallway was something else. Various weapons hung on racks attached to the walls – weapons that students were trained or specialized to use in.

Isaac headed over to the right side of the hall and lifted his own weapon of choice: the HI-Blade.

In an age where guns were outlawed, weapon manufacturers decided to redesign old-fashioned weapons into more "new-aged" and "technologically advanced" versions. A HI-Blade was one of these new weapons, for example. Modeled after light and medium weighted swords, the HI-Blade resembled

a regular sword, except the blade itself was wider by at least two inches, and the hilt had a small turbine installed into it to produce power. Once activated, a HI-Blade's blade became electrically charged.

HI-Blade in hand, Isaac walked through the hallway and into the Colosso main chamber. Just as he had been told and expected, Gareth Jerra stood in the center, a larger sword slung across his back, and a grin on his face.

Gareth Jerra was another 17-year-old boy as well at the West Angaran Academy. He had easily befriended Isaac during his first year at the Academy, when the two boys were fourteen. He was very tall – about 6'5" – and many called him a giant because of his stature, his physical build, and the mass amounts of muscle that adorned his arms and chest. He had long red hair that fell past his shoulders – or, naturally anyways – but all of Gareth's hair was spiked upward with obvious amounts of hair gel, defying gravity and the laws of physics. His eyes were a pleasant mixture of red and brown, and his happy-go-lucky nature was contagious to just about everyone. He, too, was dressed in the same uniform as Isaac, only he left his jacket unbuttoned, exposing a white undershirt.

"Hey there, buddy," grinned Gareth, "how's life?"

Isaac smirked and raised his HI-Blade. "Same as always."

"Cool." Gareth reached behind his back and unsheathed his own weapon – a broadsword. Unlike Isaac's HI-Blade, Gareth's weapon was far too large and too heavy to have the same turbine system installed into its hilt, it was more or less the same type of broadsword used many years ago. "Ready?"

Isaac nodded his response. In a normal fight, Isaac would have had the upper hand with the capabilities of the HI-

Blade. However, the Academy's own HI-Blades had a safety installed onto the turbine, preventing the turbine from producing power. And since he really *couldn't* just go and stab his friend in the ribs...

It was *painfully* obvious that Gareth had the upper hand.

Being the brash person that he is, Gareth took the initiative – his broadsword rested on one shoulder, while his sword hand clutched the handle. He ran towards Isaac and swung the massive blade down. Isaac, however, was still the faster of the two, and ran out of the way just in time.

With Gareth struggling to lift his weapon back up, Isaac took the opportunity to attack his sparring partner. Dashing forward, he began striking at Gareth's sides with the flat of his weapon's blade. What surprised Isaac, however, was that Gareth suddenly lifted his own weapon up, spun around, and made another downward swing – this one at Isaac's head. Using his quick reflexes, Isaac brought his HI-Blade up and intercepted the attack, but it wasn't easy; Gareth outmatched him both physically and in swordsmanship, and the redhead began pushing Isaac back.

A step back. Another step back. Isaac was slowly being pushed back into a corner by the strength of Gareth's weapon against his own, and Gareth's brute strength as well. Isaac could feel his arms starting to droop downwards because of the strain of holding the broadsword at bay.

Isaac was never one to ever quit, and for a split-second, his sapphire orbs twinkled.

The building started to shake. Although the two were dueling in the fourth level of a five-floor building, the vibration of the shaking earth was setting Gareth off balance. The tremor slowly became worse. The shaking continued to

grow worse and worse, until finally, Gareth – not really being the most coordinated person in the world – lost his balance and fell butt-first onto the floor. His broadsword lay several feet behind him, and a scowl adorned his face.

"Isaac," he growled, "I thought we were going to fight like *real* men! Not be cowardly about this!"

Isaac lowered the HI-Blade back to his side. "We're going to be Adepts soon enough, Gareth. May as well get over that honor code of yours – it's going to be the death of you." He walked over to his friend, and offered him a hand.

Garet stared at his friend's hand before finally he cracked a smile and allowed his friend to lift him up. "I know, I know – but I still think that using Psynergy in a warrior's duel is a cowardly thing."

Garet knew better, however. Isaac wasn't in the top of their class for nothing. While students feared the mystery and amazing skill that was Isaac DelSol, the teachers and faculty adored him for it. From Isaac's first real month as a student in the Academy three years ago, the teachers were awed by his amazing tactical instincts. Isaac could spot his opponent's weakness and mishaps within the first few seconds of a fight. Gareth had lost because Isaac took note of his inability to remain coordinated while fighting with a broadsword.

Another reason why the teachers loved his skill as a student was his unnatural ability to use Psychic Energy – codenamed Psynergy – in simple, complex, or difficult tasks as well as combat without flaw. While many of his fellow students thought he was a Pure – a member of Adept who was born with the natural ability to use Psynergy – but in reality, he was just a Norm – someone who was given the chemical

enhancements to use Psynergy. Gareth had been given the enhancements as well.

"Ah, well," smirked Gareth, "A win's a win, and a loss's a loss. C'mon, I think Jenna wanted to meet you in the library after she finished her exam today."

"You mean she *isn't* finished? I took that chemistry exam same time as her, and I've been done for about an hour."

"Well, that's because we're not all frickin' geniuses like you, Einstein." Gareth rolled his eyes.

"Heh. Sorry."

"S'allright... anyway, she said it was important. Something about the field exam tomorrow."

Isaac nodded in understanding. The Adept Field Exam was the end-all be-all test that all aspiring Adept members had to take once they completed three years of schooling in one or more of the various Academies. Sure, all future Adept members were required to graduate after three years – but passing this Field Exam was mandatory and required for a license. If anyone scored below an 85, the Academy would make you repeat the Field Exam during the summer months (Academy students spent 3 long years at the Academy year-round; however, summer was reserved for the students to "goof off" more than during the other months, but classes were still held) and if *that* test was done poorly, then the student would have to stay for another year.

The two friends chose to change the subject, and placed their weapons back on the weapons rack while having a nice conversation on the Joys and Sorrows of Women Companionship. On a normal circumstance, should anyone

try to spring up conversation with Isaac, Isaac would either ignore or end the conversation immediately.

With Gareth it was a different case. Gareth was one of the few people Isaac could safely say he trusted more than anything or anyone else in all of Weyard; he was like a brother to him.

As the two walked on through the halls, the students once again stopped what they were doing and started to whisper about Isaac behind his back. Gareth immediately scowled and was about to yell at a second-year student, but Isaac shook his head – an obvious "Don't do it". They reached the elevator and boarded it. As soon as the door shut, Gareth smashed the wall with his fist.

"Damn it, Isaac! You know how much it pisses me off when those *idiots* start spreading bull like that about you!"

Isaac kept his same impassive expression. "It's alright, Gareth. Let them say what they want... it doesn't bother me anymore."

"But-"

"Really."

Gareth sighed. "If you say so..." He released a weak smile, "Hey, I heard while taking my algebra final that you were some top-secret project developed by the government to serve in Adept. Heh, 'magine that...some of the stuff you hear..."

And Isaac smiled weakly along with him.

* * * * *

The W.A. Academy's library was one of the most resourceful information surfaces around. The Academy headmaster, Headmaster Kraden, was a big history buff, and wanted to enlighten his students about the history of Angara and the world – because, as he said, "The world is doomed to repeat itself!"

Many students considered him a "loon", or a "quack", or various other names regarding his slightly odd policies.

But Isaac had great respect for him. Kraden was the man who volunteered to become his legal guardian 7 years ago after a terrible storm that separated Isaac from his parents on a simple trip to Vault. As Kraden told him and as Isaac remembered, Isaac was found in an alleyway – alone, helpless, and soaked to the bone. Isaac knew his parents hadn't abandoned him. He just ... couldn't remember *how* he became separated from them in the first place. When Isaac told the police of their descriptions, Dora DeSol and Kyle DeSol were never found. They were, naturally, presumed dead.

And since Isaac was taken care of by Kraden, he had large respect for literature. In fact, his guardian had suggested he read a book about the legendary lighting of the Lighthouses – structures of yore. The book was currently situated in Isaac's pocket.

Isaac and Gareth entered the library with grimaces on their faces; if they were late, and Jenna had finished her test, then they were screwed. Royally screwed.

Gareth gulped. "Well, let's just blend in and look natural, o' buddy o' pal..."

"There you are!!"

Isaac and Gareth slumped forwards. She had found them. "Hi, Jenna..." they said simultaneously.

"Garet, I *told* you to bring Isaac down here once I finished my test!" she paused, then sniffed the air. "Garet...have you been...sparring with him?" Gareth grimaced – she had smelt his sweat.

"Um...maybe?" Jenna frowned at his incompetence.

Jenna Feu was another seventeen-year-old student at the Academy. She, too, had easily befriended Isaac upon her arrival 3 years ago along with Gareth. She was a spirited girl full of life and energy, but very easy to tick off, and would more than likely beat you into submission if you called her "ugly". She stood at 5'9", and was as tan as Gareth. She had long, volumatic red hair tinted pink, tied into a high ponytail at the top of her head. Pink lip gloss sparkled on her lips, blush could be seen on her cheeks, and her eyes were accented with eyeliner. She was dressed in the girls version of the uniform: a white blouse with a navy blue sweater, and a navy blue skirt. A gold scarf was laced around her neck.

While Isaac and Gareth specialized in swords, Jenna herself specialized in staves and spears. Jenna's personal combat philosophy was that as long as she wasn't *too* close to the enemy, she'd be just fine.

"Garet..." she started, "I know sparring for tomorrow's exam is helpful and all, but does it have to be with Isaac? And *now*? You knew I wanted to talk to him!"

"That's not true!" he said defensively. "For all you know, I could've wanted him to spar with him before you wanted to talk to him!"

"Pssh. Keep making up excuses, Gareth."

"It's not an excuse!"

Isaac couldn't help but shake his head. Those two were always bickering about *something* - let it be from political views to personal beliefs, or the most likely team to win in the Weyard Basketball League.

"Anyways," began Jenna, turning her attention towards Isaac, "you did send the registration forms for tomorrow's exam to Headmaster Kraden, right?"

Isaac nodded. "Yeah. Kind of important to forget, don't you think?"

"Don't get smart with me!" she snarled.

Isaac sighed. "Sorry. Yes, I sent the registration forms, and yes, I registered us as a team." He took a seat down at a nearby table. Although it was optional, most students took the Field Exam with their friends, called "teams", and a team of four was the limit in the exam, and in any Adept group.

Jenna let loose a sigh of relief. "Well, that's good," she looked back at Isaac, "How are you feeling?"

"Fine."

"Any sicknesses?"

"No."

"Psychological or spiritual problems?"

"No."

"Alchemy levels too high?!"

"Jenna..."

"What?"

Garet seated himself next to Isaac. "Jeez, Jenna. You always get so uptight about these tests..."

"You say that like it's a bad thing!" she countered, "It never hurts to be prepared, Jerra!" Garet cringed as she called him by his surname.

"I have to agree with Jenna on this one," said Isaac. This surprised Garet, as the pensive blond hardly ever sided with either of them in one of their arguments. "This is it, Garet. This is where we prove ourselves to all the Academy. It still doesn't hurt to be a little careful."

"Whatever."

Jenna smirked. "Ooh, I think Garet's jealous of my amazing debating skills!"

"Am not!"

"Hey, guys," said Isaac, changing the subject, "We...*are* going to be a team if we get our licenses... right?" As much as the rumors and the behind his back insults didn't bother him, the thought that two out of the three people he trusted the most – if not at all – leaving him after he graduated scared him senseless.

"What do you mean 'if' we pass?" snorted Garet, "Dude, we *are* going to pass the exam."

Isaac stared at him. "You mean it?"

"No doubts there."

"Ditto," said Jenna, "Isaac... we know how you feel about..." she chose her words carefully "...being left alone." She knelt down to his level, paying no heed to the whispers and stares from other students in the library. "We're too close to just *leave* each other!"

"Yeah, man," said Gareth, patting his friend on the back, "We'll be a team – the most feared and respected team of Adept members that Weyard has ever seen!"

Jenna giggled. "Ooh, nice one there, Gareth."

Gareth beamed. "Thanks, baby. I'm here all week."

And for the first time all day, Isaac truly laughed.

* * * * *

Wow. I do think that that is the most I've ever written in a single chapter. Go me.

For those of you who've played (or ever heard of) Xenosaga and are wondering where the influence from that is coming, just wait a few more chapters.

Just to clear something up: I think it's safe to say that I've ruled out both Flameshipping and Valeshipping in this fic because of the family-like closeness Isaac, Gareth, and Jenna have, so I think it would be virtually impossible for them to start having romantic feelings about each other. As for other pairings...well, those are undecided.

I should also warn you that the language may start to get more intense later on, as will the gore and other, more teenager/adult themes. I like to keep my work as real as possible, and I don't want teenagers going "Oh golly gee! The world is going to be destroyed, but I feel like sunshine

and daisies..." I just... don't like that. Anyways, I think I'm done talking about this, and I'm hoping that you're going to click the "Submit Review" button.

Go on.

You know you want to...

***Chapter 2*: Testing Day Begins**

Woo-hoo. Six reviews. I feel special, that I do.

It pleases me ever so how well people are starting to take to this fanfic already, when only one chapter has been published. But I digress, and I'm sure you'd rather read the chapter then listen to me ramble, no?

I had to cut out a lot from this chapter ... because ... it was just way too long in its original form. I do believe that the last 25-40% was cut out of this chapter, mainly due to it's original length.

Oh, and if you feel like this is turning into Garet/Jenna because of this chapter...well, it isn't. Look to what I said at the end last chapter, kay? ^^;

Disclaimer: Refer to Chapter One.

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Tap-Tap-Tap.

The melodious sound of fingers strumming on a keyboard was the only thing that could be heard in his office. Albino-white skin could be seen typing away at the black keyboard, filing up his report.

He paused in his work. Slowly, he reached for his vibrating cell-phone and put it up to his ear.

"Valentino," the man stated.

There was a pause in the room.

"Ah, good. Now then, when shall I expect him here at our division of *Golden Sun Enterprises*?"

Another pause.

"... I see. Well, pass along the information to the Headmaster. Tell the old man that we're expecting him, and soon. Thank you, Miss Katsumoto." He brushed the "Cancel" button on his cell-phone, setting it back down on his desk.

And he went back to his report.

* * * * *

"Man, I could *really* go for a beer right now..." moaned Gareth.

Gareth and Isaac were currently in the boy's dormitories – specifically in Isaac's bedroom – and the two were discussing military strategies that one must execute in battle, as a "review" of sorts for the field exam.

"Gareth..." sighed Isaac, "you and I both know how... *intoxicated* ... you can get with just one beer."

"Hmph," Gareth crossed his arms, "look, just because of that one time I had one beer too many –"

"You had five beers, Gareth."

"- and started coming on to every pretty girl I could see –"

"*Including* Jenna."

"- doesn't mean that I'm always going to get like that when I start drinking!" he finished, blushing madly.

Isaac blinked. "Still doesn't mean I can *trust* you with a bottle of beer, now can I?"

"Eh, shut up," Gareth took a seat down on Isaac's bed. Isaac released a tiny smirk and turned his body around on the chair he was currently sitting on.

"Alright then, Mr. Boozer," he said as his smirk deepened, "what course of action do you take when confronted with multiple enemies?"

Garet scratched his head. "Let's see... go and knock them out one-by-one?"

Isaac sighed. "Yes, if you wanted to kill yourself."

"Huh?"

"Why do you think Adept members are injected with that Alchemy stuff, anyway?" Before Gareth could respond, Isaac answered for him, "Because, when used properly, Psynergy can eliminate groups of enemies without having to get in close. We're *mercenaries*, Gareth; you really need to drop this whole 'honor code' of yours."

Garet considered himself an old-fashioned knight in a modern-day world. It was his personal belief that all men – mercenaries, warriors, and soldiers alike – needed to fight with honor, pride, and dignity. He considered gun weapons to be heinous and sacrilege to everything he stood for, and that "only cowards attack from a distance; real men fight to the death with all their might, not with some cheap pistol!"

Garet frowned deeply. "Oh yeah, and blasting open the earth with your mind is *really* fair."

"Whatever."

"All right then, Mr. Tough Guy, answer me this: what if you encounter a monster that's under a different alignment than

your own Psynergy?"

"Simple: If it's your own or of your two neutral types, you can fight them off, but if it's of the opposite alignment, you retreat."

"... you can still fight them off."

"If you wanted to get killed," Isaac pointed out, "and I don't feel like dieing anytime soon."

Garet sighed. As much as he hated to admit, Isaac was right, and always would be right when it came to battle tactics. Isaac *was*, after all, the best strategist the West Angaran Academy had seen in nearly nineteen years, and could easily prove it with just a simple round of sparring. No one had ever been able as to send Isaac to the infirmary in any practice duel, and it was this sort of reputation that did nothing to calm the rumors that spread about him.

Garet's own battle tactics were of the following: rush the opponent and fight 'til the death. Simple as that.

Garet turned his head to the digital clock that Isaac kept in his room. The red digits stared back at him. **10:00 PM.**

Garet stood up and dusted his uniform off, "Well, I'd better be going Isaac. Need a good night's sleep, after all."

Isaac nodded, "Yeah, sure."

Garet gave his friend a thumb's up, and promptly excused himself from the room. Alone at last, Isaac sighed in relief and plopped himself down onto his bed. He opened his eyes and stared at the white ceiling. It stared back as much as a ceiling could. His eyes darted around his dormitory

bedroom, for what would probably be the last time as a military cadet.

His room didn't contain much, really. There was the usual: bed, desk, computer, dresser. Most of the other students decorated their rooms with banners, pictures, and awards from various different things; Jenna herself had many, many posters decorated into her room for her favorite band: Cloud Brand. His room was rather plain, though. The only items of interest in his room was a wooden sword Kraden had gotten him as a child, and a picture of Isaac, Garet, and Jenna in their swimsuits from the trip to the Kalay shores last summer.

Isaac tried to memorize the feeling of his room as it was now; tomorrow everything would be different.

Deciding to retire for the night, Isaac undressed himself down to boxers and undershirt, nodded to himself, and collapsed under the sheets.

* * * * *

Bzzt! Bzzt! Bzzzzzzzt!

Isaac opened a bleary eye and glared hatefully at his alarm clock. Unsurprisingly, the clock did not glare back. Instead, it glowed the time back at him. **6:45 AM.**

Isaac lifted himself upright and yawned deeply. He blinked the sleep from his eyes and forced his body out of bed, throwing a clean uniform on. It didn't bother him that he was up so early; he usually was up this early anyway, and Isaac had some last-minute matters to attend to before the field exam.

As he buttoned up his jacket, his attention turned to the picture he had on his desk. He couldn't help but chuckle at the scene: Jenna had him in a friendly headlock, and Gareth's sunglasses had slid down his nose in an attempt to look "cool". They all had smiles and laughs on their faces – even Isaac. The cadet couldn't help but chuckle at the picture.

He took one last glance of himself in the mirror, then exited his room.

* * * * *

Within the next 45 minutes, Isaac found himself in the infirmary - shirtless, and several wires injected into the veins in his right arm. A young nurse – possibly seventeen or eighteen – with long dark blue hair was looking over a computer screen. A statistical graph appeared on the screen, and the nurse smiled.

"Thanks for coming here, Mr. DelSol. It's good to know that some of you students out here actually care about the Alchemy levels in your bloodstream."

Isaac's face remained emotionless. "Just tell me my levels, Miss...?"

The girl turned to him, a witty smile on her face. "My name's Megan Chonce, please call me Megan, thank you very much. And since you seem *so* interested about good ol' me, I'll let you know that I'm eighteen years old – "

"Please. Just tell me my levels."

Megan, in spite of herself, giggled. So what she had heard from the other students was true. "Alright, Mr. DelSol. The Alchemy levels in your bloodstream are in the normal

parameters; perfectly stable – no fluctuations or anything." She looked up from the screen, and focused her eyes on him.

Isaac blinked. "What?"

"Oh! Sorry. I was just trying to find out... what you were... injected with, that's all."

Isaac nodded in understand. He knew what she meant. Those who were injected with Alchemy went through a change physically and mentally – it was the only price to pay for Adept members. Changes in hair color, eye color, skin tones, and smaller things were the "usual" physical changes. Depending on the chemicals, some members of Adept were granted an IQ boost, strength boost, or speed boost.

It was plain obvious that Megan was a Mercury – someone who could harness healing energy (And that was why she was a nurse, or so Isaac thought) and usually became much more docile and calm in nature – because of her dark blue hair, a common sign of Mercury-aligned Adept.

"It's okay," he said, "but I'm a Venus, if you must know."

Venuses were rare in the ranks of Adept. The "Venus" Psynergy was only given out to those who excelled evenly in all the tests that determined what Psynergy was best suited for you. Those who excelled in physical combat were injected with "Mars", like Gareth and Jenna. Those who excelled in the academic part of the Academy were injected with "Jupiter". Finally, those who were nimble and quick on their feet were injected with "Mercury".

What made Venus so special – beside its rarity – was that it was the "omnipotent Psynergy", as some called it. Those who were given Venus were granted a slight speed, strength,

and intelligence boost – not as much as those that belonged to their respective recipients, however.

Megan's eyebrows shot up. "Wow. Impressive, Mr. DelSol."

"Thanks."

Megan grinned and walked over to Isaac. Carefully, she unplugged the needles injected into his body, and nodded him a "you can leave now." Isaac bowed his head in thanks, grabbed his jacket, and headed out of the infirmary ward.

Isaac quickly found a bathroom to change in. Before you knew it, he was back in the hallways of the Academy. It was still early, and he highly doubted that anyone would still be up.

It wasn't long until he found the elevator. He pressed the "down" button, and pretty soon the elevator had appeared before him. What surprised him, however, was that as soon as the doors opened, he found Gareth leaning against the elevator wall, a bruise on his neck.

Gareth grinned. "Yo, Isaac!"

Isaac walked inside the elevator, hitting the "Floor 1" button. "Hey, Gareth."

The doors shut, and there was silence.

"Nice hickey."

Gareth's face went through several shades of red, and remained silence for the rest of the ride down, if only out of embarrassment.

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"Man, I *knew* I shouldn't have started putting the moves on that blonde chick..." Gareth moaned to himself.

The two boys were in the cafeteria, eating breakfast. Gareth had his hand over the "bruise" on his neck, but Isaac knew that was rather pointless. Gareth had the reputation of a player at the Academy, and many girls (with the exception of Jenna) chased after him mercilessly. Sure, it was common knowledge that Gareth was friends with Isaac, but that, surprisingly, did nothing to stop the girls from trying to make Gareth their boyfriend.

Isaac smirked. "Maybe that'll teach you to control your testosterone one of these days."

"Pheh. Like *that*ll ever happen."

Isaac bit into his muffin, chewing pensively. "You truly are the ladies man, *Sir* Gareth."

Gareth puffed out his chest. "Damn proud of it, too."

Isaac smirked again, than went back to his muffin. He was going to need all the energy he could get; the field exam began in half an hour.

Gareth swallowed a piece of bacon. "I hope they give us some *actual* quality-weapons for this test, man. The stuff they usually give us for the tests are shit, dude."

Isaac frowned. "That just depends on the weapon you're using. Why should you have a problem with a simple *broadsword*?"

Gareth scoffed. "Because! Most of the ones I have to take during those tests are rusted, dented, or cracked! It's a disgrace!"

Isaac sighed. "Whatever." He finished his muffin, and leaned back in his chair. The only other students up at this hour were those about to take the field exam, and they all seemed to be rather skittish about it all. Everyone he knew from the graduating class was there...except...

He frowned. "Where's Jenna...?"

Garet shrugged. "I dunno. I tried knocking at her door earlier, but she must've been in a deep trance - I tried slamming into the door and everything!" He leaned back in his chair, "I would've gone in, too, if it weren't for that policy of 'Gentleman shall not trespass in the ladies' rooms!'"

Isaac snickered. "Why didn't you just burn the stupid thing down, then? That would've gotten her attention..."

Garet fidgeted in his seat. "I thought about it..."

Isaac let out a small laugh. "Smooth."

"Oh, shut up!"

Isaac shook his head, his trademarked smirk still plastered on his face. "Alright, alright, Garet. I'll shut up if you want me to so badly." He turned his head towards the door, and his golden eyebrows shot up. The teachers were gathering those taking the exam today, and Isaac motioned Garet with a jerk of his head to follow him over there. Garet grinned eagerly and cracked his knuckles.

"Oh, boy, what fun we'll be having today..."

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Headmaster Kraden's old eyes stared joyfully at the congregating students in the school courtyard. He was an

old man of sixty-one – the kind of old man that had been able to keep his height and his back straight, while the rest of his limbs became crooked over time. His wild gray hair stood on end, making him look like a nutcase or some sort of mad scientist. He pushed his glasses back up his nose upon seeing his adoptive son Isaac and his friend Garet Jerra enter the congregating mass. He cleared his throat and lifted a microphone to his lips.

"Greetings, my lovely students! How are you all doing today?"

A chorus of "Fine," echoed through the mass of students.

The old man smiled. "That's good, that's good! As long as you feel fine and never down, you will make great Adepts!"

Amidst the crowd, Isaac heard some students snicker and make rude comments about the Headmaster. Isaac's eyebrow furrowed, but chose against splitting the ground in two.

Kraden began to speak up again. "But, by now you all realize what today is. In one week from now, you shall graduate from our beloved Academy. I hope that most – if not all – of you pass this exam, and gain your licenses. Then, and only then, will you all truly be members of Adept."

Some of the students whooped in glee and excitement.

Kraden smiled, and stared out at the crowd. "This is the beginning of your new lives. I will give you all ten minutes to gather your supplies and form your teams." He raised his hand and snapped his fingers.

Several weapon racks extended from the ground, carrying the various weapons that the Academy trained its students

in. Isaac crossed his arms and smirked. Kraden surely put a show on for this year's graduating class. He looked up to the podium Kraden stood on, only to see the man had gone with some Adept senior officers, talking with them diligently.

Garet tapped him on the shoulder. "C'mon, let's get some good equipment before it's taken."

"Good idea."

The two made their way to their respected weapons; Garet found a polished broadsword and slung it over his shoulder. Isaac reached for a HI-Blade and eyed the safety. It was still on, but unlike the ones used in the Colosso system, these safeties could be removed easily. Satisfied, he also took a sheath for his HI-Blade and hooked it to his belt. He then promptly sheathed the weapon.

Garet walked over to him. "Where the hell is Jenna, man... I haven't seen her all day..."

Isaac shrugged. "She'd better get here soon, though. Look, I'm going to get some medical supplies too. You wait here, got it?"

"Sure thing."

Isaac headed over to a different rack with various white boxes resting on it. He took one off the rack and opened its contents: some poison antidotes, some anti-paralysis injections, several green liquids (Isaac identified them as Med Potions), and some water bottles. Nodding his head in satisfaction, he closed the lid and made his way back over to Garet.

As he neared his friend, he saw that Jenna had rejoined them, and was obviously out of breath. As Isaac drew closer,

he noticed that she was missing her usual make-up, and that the yellow scarf she usually had tied around her neck was missing too. Isaac rolled his eyes though, however, when he saw that she was wearing high-heeled leather boots. Jenna *was* a fashion queen, after all.

He set the box down on the ground and stared at the boots. "I'm never going to understand how women walk in those."

Jenna smiled. "It's a girl thing."

Garet shook his head. "What took you so long, anyway?" he asked, "I was on the verge of burning your door down and everything!"

Jenna blushed. "I...I got a call from one of my friends back in Vault...lost track of time...overslept..."

The two boys nodded in understanding. Isaac kicked the med box over to her. "Here. You're the registered paramedic, after all."

Jenna nodded absentmindedly, looking through the staff selection. Finally, she grabbed one that had a cattle prod-like attachment to it. "This should do it," she grinned. She picked up the med box with her left hand, and fondled the staff with her free one. The three turned around once they heard a microphone turn back on.

Kraden spoke into the mike once more. "The ten minutes are up, and I hope that you are all prepared," he said, as the racks retreated to the ground below, "because there is no do-over for the next two months. Now listen closely!" he said, tone changing from kind to stern.

"The citizens of Lunpa have been kind enough to lend us their old military fortress for this exam. We shall fly you all

over there via jet, and one of our senior officers shall accompany the teams that are riding on them. They will give you a briefing on your exact mission, but you all must infiltrate through the fortress and bring back a specified item to here, via foot. I must warn you that we released monsters into the fortress, so please be careful. Those of you who make it back here by dusk shall pass, and those who make it pass later then that will be given an Incomplete for this exam. Points are awarded for your skill, time, and survivability."

As he was about to finish, a trio of small airplanes landed outside the school. Their doors opened, and ramps extended from them. The students turned back from the landed planes and took one last, long glance at Kraden. The old man's eyes were downcast, and he lifted them back upwards towards Isaac, staring directly at him.

"That is all."

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Reviewer Responses

[Trisket-n-Gunther] ~ *Glad you liked. I would review yours back, but I believe that FF.N removed the Fanfiction Poetry section before I actually had the time to read one of your poems. (I browsed through your profile, so I know what you wrote.)*

Sieg ~ *Yes, the other Golden Sun characters will - slowly - be introduced as this progresses. And I catch your drift, if you know what I'm saying... ^_~*

[roc-girl] ~ *Glad you liked it, too. I'm also pleased you like long chapters, but like I said earlier, I had to limit this chapter to that last scene with Kraden and Isaac.*

[Joker's Specter] ~ Sweet! Got someone who added this to their favorites list! Yes, I too am aware of the error when I introduced Garet's name. I spell-checked it absentmindedly so... Also, it pleases me greatly that you're going to expect great things from this.

Mercury Gold ~ And I applaud you, too, for liking this so much. But, don't be so hard on yourself. "Assassin of the Night" is by far one of the coolest Mudshippers I've read in a looong time. As for the Mudshipping bit...since I'd rather introduce the pairings as the story progresses rather than the summary, I guess I'm forcing all of you to keep on reading this. ^_~

[Luce*Scurio] ~ Cool. Nice to know that! Since you bring up yaoi in your review: I'm not sure if I should include it or not. I have nothing against yaoi or yuri 'cause I ain't a homophobe (Not saying that ANYONE is; it is perfectly fine if you don't write it because you're weirded out if you ever attempted to write it - I feel the same way.), but since I'm not a fangirl, it seems rather ... weird to write. I have a couple of humor fics if you ever wanted to read one of those, too. [/shamelessplug]

That just about wraps this chapter up. I'm going to massage my fingers in the sink, but feel free to leave a review!

Or, I'll cut your head off.

...or something.